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The Lyf of Seynt Kenelme Kynge
and Martir, from Caxton's Golden
Legend, with a Note on the
Origin of the Text



I Was born and lerned myn englissh in Kente
in the weeld where I doubte not is spoken as
brode and rude englissh as is in ony place of
england.

Wylliam Caxton

NOTE ON THE ORIGIN OF CAXTON'S GOLDEN LEGEND

IN the latter half of the thirteenth century, Jacobus de Voragine, Archbishop of Genoa, who died in 1298, compiled a book called "Legenda Aurea," in which the lives and miracles of numerous saints were narrated. This was found very useful to the priests in their sermons, and soon became so popular that it was translated into nearly every European language. The Latin text of "Voragine" has been reprinted from an early manuscript, and edited by Dr. Th. Graesse, 8vo, Lipsiæ, 1840. It has also received a modern French dress under the title "La Legende doree, par Jacques

de Voragine, traduit du Latin, par M. G. B., 8vo, Paris, 1843." In the early part of the fourteenth century, Jean Belet, an author but little known to modern bibliographers, though often quoted by the writers of his age, translated the Latin of Jacobus into French, not, however, without embellishing it with many new additions. Shortly after the production of Belet, Jehan de Vignay, undertook a new version in French of "La Legende doree," which he accomplished before 1380, as he dedicated it to "Jeane, royne de France." His translation, however, was founded on the previous labours of Belet, which he amplified adding about 44 new legends. About the middle of the fifteenth century, certain "worthy

Clerks and Doctors of Divinity" compiled a "Book of the Life of Saints," which they describe as "drawn into English after the tenor of the Latin." These worthy Clerks & Doctors, however, would have given a much more true account of their labours had they stated that, with the exception of some additional fables not traceable in the original Latin, they owed the whole of their compilation to "La Legende doree" of Jehan de Vignay.

It is probable that in Caxton's time the English version here noticed was well known; indeed we may infer this from the account given by our Printer of the origin of his own text: Against me here might some persons say, that this Legend

hath been translated tofore, and truth it is; but forasmuch as I had by me a Legend in French, another in Latin, & the third in English, which varied in many and diverse places; & also many histories were comprised in the two other books which were not in the English book, therefore I have written one out of the said three books.

to Caxton may be given this praise, that in several places where the “worthy doctours of divinite” had inserted in their English version some stories more incredible or more filthy than usual, he very discreetly considerably modified or altogether omitted them.

—Blade’s Life of Caxton

The Lyf of Seynt Kenelme

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The Lyf of Seynt Kenelme



✿ THE LYF OF SEYNT KENELME KINGE AND MARTIR

Here beginneth the lyf
of Seynt Kenelme

Seynt Ken-
elme martir
was kynge
of a parte of
Englond by
Walys. His fader was
kynge to fore hym, and
was named Kenulph, and

founded the Abbey of
Wynchecombe, and sette
therin monks. And whan
he was dede he was bury-
ed in the same abbey. And
at that tyme Winchecomb
was the best toun of that
countraye. In Englond
ben iii pryncipaul riuers,
and they ben Tameys,
Seuarn, and Humbre.

Thiskyng Kenelme was kyng of Wurbeter shyre, Warwik shyre and gloucetre shyre, and the byshop of Wurbetre was bisshop of those 3 shires, and he was kyng also of Derby shyre, Chesshire, Shropshyre, Staffordshyre, herfordchyre, Notynggham shyre, Norhamton shyre, Bokpynggham shyre, Oxfordshire, Lyncetreshyre, and Lyncoln shire. Alle this was called the marche of Walys, & of alle those contrayes seynt Kenelm was kyng and Wynchecombe that tyme was chyeft cite of alle thyse shyres. And in that tyme were in Englonde vi kynges, & byfore that Oswold had ben king

of alle Englonde. And after hym it was departed in seynt Kenelmes dayes.

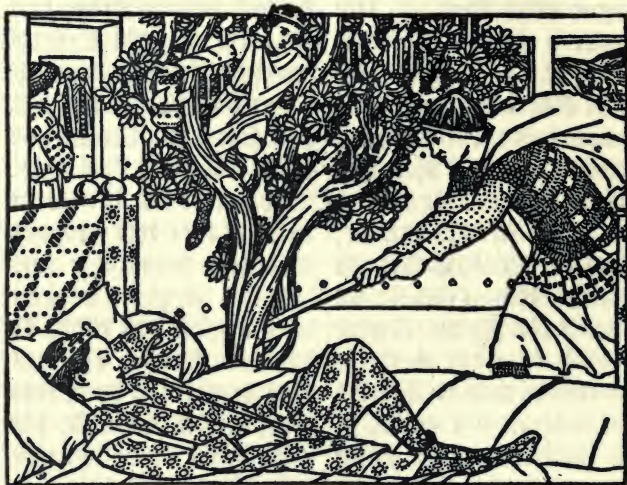
Kenulf hys fader was a fulholymman and Dornemylde and Quendrede were susters of Seynt Kenelme. And Kenulf his fader deyde the yere of our Lord viii C xix. Thenne was Kenelme made kyng whan he was vii yere of age. & his suster Dornemylde louyd hym moche, & they lyued holply to gydre to theyr lyues ende. But quendrede that other suster torned hyr to wyckednes, and had grete enuye at her brother Kenelme,

by cause he was so riche
aboue her, and laboured
wyth alle her power to
destrope hym by cause
she wold be quene and
regne after hym, & lete
make a strong popson,
and gaf it to her brother.
But God kepte hym that
it neuer greyued hym. &
whan she sawe that she
coudenot preuayle ayenst
the kyng in that maner,
she laboured to Askeberd
whiche was chief ruler
aboute the Kyng, & pro-
mysed to hym a grete
somme of money, & also
her body at his wylle, yf
he wold slee this yong
kyng her brother, and
anone they accorded in
this treson.

And in this while and

that same tyme, this yong
holy kyng was a slepe
and dremed a maruellous
dreme. For hym semed
that he saw a tree stonde
by hys beddes syde, and
that the heygth thereof
touched heuen, and it
shyned as bright as gold
and had fayr braunches
ful of blosmes & fruyte.
And on euery braunche
of thys tree were tapers
of waxe brennyng and
lamps lyght, whiche
was a glorious sight to
beholde. & hym thought
that he clymed vpon this
tree, and Askeberde his
gouernour stode bynethe
and helpe down this tree
that he stode on. & whan
thys tree was fallen down,
thys holy yong kyng was

heuy and sorouful, and he tolde to his norice
 hym thought ther cam a named Wolwelyne. And
 fayr byrd whiche flewgh whan he had tolde to her
 vp to heuen wyth grete alle hys dreame, she was
 joye. And anon after thys ful heuy, & tolde to hym



dreame he awoke, & was what hit mente, and sayd
 alle abasshid of thys his suster and the trayter
 dreame, whiche anon after Askaberde had falsely

conspired his deth. For she said to hym, that he had promysed to Quedrede to slee the, and that signefyeth that he smytheth down the tree that stode by thy beddes syde. And the byrd that thou sawest flee vp to heuen signefyeth thy soule that angellys shal bere vp to heuen after thy martirdom. And anon after thys Askaberde desired the kyng that he shold goo and disporte hym by the wodes side named Clent, & as he walkid the kyng was al heuy & leyd hym down to slepe, and thenne this fals traytour purposed to haue slayn the kyng, and began to make the pyt to bury hym in.

BUT anon as God wold the kyng awoke, & sayd to thys askaberd that he laboured in bayn, ffor God wyl not that I dye in thys place. But take thys smalle rodde, and there as thou shalt sette it in the erthe, ther shal I be martred. & thenne they went forth to gydre a good way thens, tyl they cam to an hawthorn, and there he pyght the rodde in therthe, and forthwith incontynent it bare grene leuys, & sodenly it waxe to a grete asshe tree, the whiche stondeth there yet vnto thys day, & is called Kenelms asshe, & there this Askaberd smote of

thys holy yong kyngs
hede. And anon hys soule
was born vp in to heuen
in lyknes of a white douue.
And then the wycked tray-
tour drewe the body in to
a grete valey between ii
hilles, and there he made
a depe pitte and cast the
body therin and leyde the
hede vpon it. And whyles
he was aboute to smyte
of the hede, the holy kyng
knelyng on his knees
sayd this holy cantycle
Te deum laudamus, tyl
he cam to this vers *Te*
martirum candidatus, &
therwyth he yaf up hys
spryte to our lord Ihesu
Cryst in lykenes of a
douue, as afore is sayd.
Thenne anon this wicked
man Askaberd went to

Quendrede & told to hir
alle alonge how he had
don, wherof she was ful
glad, and anon after toke
on hir to be quene, and
charged on payn of deth
that no man shold speke
of Kenelme. And after
that she abandounned hir
body to wretchyd lyuing
of her fflesh in lecherye,
& brought hir owen men
to wretchyd lyuing. And
thys holy body lay long
tyme after in that wode
called Clent, for no man
durst fetche hym thens to
bury hym in halowed
place for fere of the quene
Quendrede.

And it was so that a
poure wydow by, whiche
had a white cowe, whiche
euery day was dryuen in

to the wode of Clent. And anon as she was there she wolde departe & goo in to the valeye where Kenelme was buryed, & there reste alle the day sytting by the corps wythout mete. And euery nyght come home wyth other bestes fatter & gaf more mylke than ony of the other kyen. And so contynwed certeyn yeres, wherof the peple merueyled that she euer was in so good poynt & ete no mete. That valey where as seynt Kenelmes body laye is called Coubage.

After on a tyme as the pope song mass at Rome in Seynt Peters chirche, sodenly ther cam a whyte douue & let fall a scrowe

on the aulter wheron the Pope sayd hys masse. And thys wordes were wretton therin in lettres of gold **In Clent in Coubage, Kenelme kynge barn, lyeth vnder a thorn, his hede of shorn.** And whan the pope had sayd his masse, he shewed the scrowe to alle the peple, but there was none that coude telle what it mente, tyll atte last there cam an englyssh man, & he told it openly tofore alle the peple what it ment. And thenne the pope wyth alle the peple gaf laude and prasyng to oure lord, and kepte that skrowe for a relyque. And the fest of seynt Kenelme was halowed that day solempnly

thorough alle Rome.

And anon after, the pope sent hys messagers into Englund to the Archebyssshop of Caunterbury named Wylfryde, & bad hym wyth hys byssshops goo and seke the place where the holy body lyeth, which is named Cowbage in the wode of clent. And then this place was sone knowen, by cause of the myracle that was shewd by the white cowe. And whan the Archebyssshop with other bishoppis and many other peple cam theder & fond the place, anon they lete dygge by the body, and toke it by wyth grete solemnyte. And forth wyth sprang by in the same place where as

the body had leyn, a fayre welle, whiche is called seynt Kenelmes well unto thys day, where moche peple haue ben heled of diuers sekenes and maladies.

And whan the body was aboue therth, therfylastryf bytweene them of Worcettershpyre and of gloucetreshire who shold haue thys body. And then a ful good man that was theramong them pat counseyll that alle the peple shold lye down and slepe & rest them, for the wether was thenne right hoot. And whyche of the two shires that God wold shold fyrst awake, they

to take this holy body and
goo theyr waye. And alle
the peple agreed therto, &
leyde them down to slepe.
And it happed that thabbot
of Wynchecombe and alle
his men awoke fyrst, &
they toke vp the holy body
and bare it forth toward
wynchecomb til they cam
vpon a hylle a myle fro the
abbey. And for hete and
labour they were nygh
dede for thurst, and anon
they prayed to god and to
thys holy seynt to be theyr
comforte. And thenne the
abbot pyght his croos in
to therth, and forth wyth
sprang vp ther a fayr wel
wherof they dranke and
refresshed them moche.
And thenne toke vp this
holy body wyth grete sol-

empnyte. And the monkes
receyued it wyth process-
yon solempnly & brought
it into thabbay wyth grete
reuerence, joye & myrth,
and the bellys sowned
and wer ronge wythout
mannes honde.

And thenne the quene
Quendrede demaunded
what alle thys ryngyng
mente. And they tolde her
how her brother Kenelme
was brought wyth pro-
cessyon in to thabbay, &
that the belles rongen
wyth out mannes helpe.
And thenne she sayde in
grete scorne, that is as
trewe sayd she as both
myn even falle vpon thys
boke, and anon bothe her
eyen fel out of her hede
vpon the boke. And yet it

is seen on thys day where they fylle vpon the sauter she radde that same tyme **Deus laudem.** And sone after she deyde wretchydly, and was cast out in to a foul myre, and thenne after was this holy body of Seynt Kenelme leyde in an honourable shryne, where as our Lord sheweth dayly many a myracle. To whom be gyuen laud & praysyng world wyth outen ende.
Amen.

Thus endeth the Lyl of Seynt Kenelme, Kynge and Martir, from Caxton's Golden Legend, with drawings taken from "The Quest."

Printed by Fred & Bertha Goudy
at The Village Press, Hingham, Massachusetts in
August M CM v.

160 copies.



Fred W Goudy
Bertha Goudy





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1905j

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